

Seattle design Commission

Greg Nickels
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Raymond Gastil
Planning Director, DPD

Mary Johnston
Chair

Andrew Barash

Julie Bassuk

Graham Black

Brendan Connolly

John Hoffman

Julie Parrett

Lauren Hauck

Dennis Ryan

Norie Sato

Guillermo Romano
Executive Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Tom Iurino
Senior Staff



**Department of Planning
and Development**
700 5th Avenue, Suite 2000
PO Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

TEL 206-615-1349
FAX 206-233-7883

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Greg Nickels And Council President Richard Conlin

FROM: Guillermo Romano

DATE: November 23, 2009

RE: West Thomas Street Pedestrian Overpass

CC: Grace Crunican, SDOT; Diane Sugimura and Ray Gastil, DPD

On October 15, 2009 the Seattle Design Commission reviewed the final design for the Thomas Street Pedestrian Overpass and by unanimous vote denied approval of the design of the project. The Design Commission generally tries to be encouraging and constructive when reviewing CIP projects and we rarely voice such uniform disapproval of any project that comes before us. In this case, we feel some explanation of our decision is in order.

This project has suffered from its long planning and development process. It has seen several changes in terms of SDOT personnel and design consultants and although the current SDOT project manager, Kit Loo, is doing an exemplary job, we feel the current budget constraints and the ambitious size of the project have combined to compromise the design to an unacceptable degree. Although the Design Commission has a long history with this project and has given approval to earlier iterations, the current design bears so little resemblance to earlier schemes that our previous support is irrelevant.

Celebrating 40 Years 1968-2008



The Design Commission considers the length of the span to be the main problem. We recommend that a shorter structure, spanning just the railroad tracks, would meet the intent of the project and be more fiscally responsible.

Traffic patterns, commercial patterns, pedestrian patterns and residential development along the Elliot Ave W corridor are all changing rapidly and it is within our purview to look at the long-range goals of the city. Although Elliot Ave W is considered a freight corridor and will have to do more work until the Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement project is complete, the impact and the cost of this extensive pedestrian overpass may not meet the long-term goals of the city. A better solution may be to slow traffic on Elliot Ave W. As more and more people work and live in the area, the streetscape needs to be humanized and enhanced, not dominated by an overly large concrete structure. If this overpass were scaled down, more funds could be devoted to upgrading the finishes and details.

If this project goes forward in either configuration, we offer the following suggestions:

- Return to the splayed railings and throw fence. It is a cost-effective way to add interest to the design. We suggest mesh railing material rather than pickets.
- Explore lighting fixtures that are designed to be mounted on railings.
- SDOT and the artist are encouraged to integrate the art into the structure rather than simply applying designs to the concrete support structure. The art can be appreciated more by those crossing the bridge if it is placed in the ground plane of the bridge or higher on the structure.

The Design Commission realizes the value this pedestrian bridge can have to the neighborhood, but it is part of our charter to recommend the best value for the public's design dollars and we feel strongly that a more modestly sized project will best serve the needs of all of Seattle's citizens and visitors.